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The article proposes to answer the nonspecialist's inquiries into the nature, objectives, and role of the modern language curriculum. Information is made available on career opportunities for those selecting foreign languages as their major study, and some suggestions are given on ways in which language proficiency can contribute to international understanding. (DS)

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PRESENT STATUS OF MODERN LANGUAGES IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

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At a recent meeting, a colleague who, it is true, belongs to a discipline far removed from modern languages, enquired whether a department teaching such languages was not a "service department". After this it appeared quite possible to me that this might have been a real indication of the lack of understanding of what departments dealing with modern languages actually are doing, and that others but this enquirer might be as much in the dark.

Language teaching in grade schools and in the high schools is supposed to impart to students certain levels of language skills, such as reading, writing and speaking, or even listening. Where Latin can serve as a foundation, the imparting of grammatical knowledge will be easier even in an unrelated language, one outside the Romance group; and by the same token, where Latin is absent, this will be harder. By and large, this teaching of modern languages in primary and secondary education is becoming more and more preparatory to further study of modern languages in colleges.

The actual level of the modern languages taught to undergraduates in colleges and universities throughout the United States varies with the interest the institutes of higher learning take in that field, depending on geographical location, tradition, alertness to NDEA and other enhancing factors. Even more, it will depend on the quality of preparation of the students in the modern languages at the pre-college stage. The better this preparation, the higher the level at which the teaching of modern languages in colleges can start. Except for those rare cases where a student has had no such preparation at all so that he or she must take elementary language instruction, the level at which the teaching of modern languages in colleges normally starts is the one termed "Intermediate". From here on, there is a progression through "Advanced" courses to courses stressing such skills as reading or conversation, to those offering exclusively the history of literature of the respective languages, which will have been included in an introductory form in the earlier courses, along with other aspects of language study. In all this, ideally, grammar should be offered only in review form, selectively, turning more and more to fine points in the higher courses. Actually, of course, the instructor is waging a constant war against the forgetfulness of students as regards grammar.

Now that language laboratories have become part and parcel of the equipment of schools and colleges teaching modern languages, and time having elapsed since their introduction, the scope of these adjuncts to modern language teaching, as well as their limitations, have become common knowledge among those using them, students and instructors alike. Earlier illusions about what language labs could do and what one could do with them, partly based on the delight in mechanical contrivances characterizing our age and times, have given way to a more sober appreciation. Students beginning a language (more often than not a second language half through college) can mostly learn the phonetics of such a language more rapidly and more thoroughly by the mechanical repetition and constant listening. Students on the intermediate level will profit considerably by their exposure to native speakers over the lab's listening system. Drill should preferably be carried on in class under the instructor's supervision. Higher levels of language study will still profit by certain selective uses of the laboratory. The idea that American students could find in the language lab a surrogate for the easy access to foreign language countries enjoyed by most students in Europe, has proved

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to have been somewhat exaggerated. There is no better way to learn a language or at least to improve it, than to visit a country in which it is actually spoken. Of course, what we have in mind here is naturally the study of the four or five "conventional" modern languages, primarily (French, Spanish, Italian, German, Russian). Students learning Swahili or Japanese or Uzbek, which they can only do in most places on a graduate level, will be using somewhat different and more complex laboratory techniques in keeping with the difficulties connected with the difficulties connected with the assimilation of such "unconventional" languages.

For a long time already, French universities offering courses for foreign students primarily interested in learning the French language, have added as a "must" so-called courses in "French Civilization", which actually means French cultural history with a strong emphasis on the literature as part of a broader sequence. Spanish and Italian tended to follow suit. Very soon the teaching of these Romance languages outside of their native countries developed in the same direction, and instructors adequately equipped to teach them were supposed to have acquired a sound knowledge of the cultural history of the countries whose languages they were teaching. The practice in German has been to move exactly in the same direction, especially since there is a far greater cultural differentiation among German-speaking countries as compared to others: cultural distinctions between Germany and Austria or Switzerland and Germany or Austria imperatively required such an approach in the teaching of German in non-German countries. With the introduction of Russian into the curriculum, an even greater emphasis has had to be placed on the teaching of general cultural factors, not only literary ones, along with the teaching of the Russian language <u>per se</u>. Thus the trend has been, all over the world, to broaden the scope of teaching of the "conventional" modern language to the dimensions of actual "area-studies". This has resulted in stiffer requirements for those teaching these modern languages. But there is also another interesting aspect: as the teaching of history within history departments has tended to become less and less that of "political" history and developed more and more toward the understanding of history in the socio-economic and the socio-political meaning, hence in a direction approaching and often touching cultural history, the disciplines of so-called modern philology and history have become quite closely interrelated, or, to say the least, related.

It should be borne in mind that college students majoring in one modern language, which almost inevitably means learning a second one as well, are not simply being prepared, and preparing themselves, to become language-teachers on the secondary level or in colleges and universities, as is so commonly thought. Seven distinct careers in addition to teaching are open to them in the United States: The State Department and its ancillary services, such as USIS; the Armed Services and their ancillary services; "Big Business" with foreign branches and connections; high-level journalism with activities in foreign countries a major element; "Communications" such as radio and TV with foreign commitments parallel to those of the press, but different in emphasis; Transportation, such as shipping lines and airlines, with obvious foreign connections and travel agencies handling all kinds of transportation in general; high-level hotels and chains of hotels, operating with foreign countries and in them. All these branches of activity and some in-between forms are the real scope of the careers open to those majoring in a modern language.

I should like to return, in concluding, to the point I started from in these thoughts on the present and actual status of modern languages in American education: Far from being in any sense whatever a "service" discipline, simply providing additional needed skills for those studying, let us say, physics, engineering, history or sociology, etc., the modern languages--the so-called "conventional" ones--form an absolutely co-equal discipline, opening careers in a wide variety of human activities other than teaching or translating or interpreting, being those activities more immediately linked with the command of a language; yet, as we have seen, the concept of modern languages has moved--has been forced to move--from this immediate approach

to far more comprehensive outlooks. In a very real sense, the modern languages as taught today and as studied at present, do not just open a gate to the better understanding of peoples and cultures through the acquiring of a knowledge, or even a command of, the respective language: they have become in themselves a gateway, encompassing much of what lies beyond the older and more limited usages and methods.

In Germany (and in German) the distinction between the "Natural Sciences" (Naturwissenschaften) and the "Sciences of the Mind" (Geisteswissenschaften) is very informative; this difference is introduced into the present discussion of where to place the emphasis in the general educational process. A strict limitation of any part of the young generation to the "Natural Sciences" only is considered dangerously one-sided (Roetzer, f.i.), and the study of languages is held to be the one most apt to develop the faculties of the mind, in line with the aims and ideals of the "Sciences of the Mind".